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ABSTRACT

Conference interpreting is an oral impromptu activity. Since texts delivered at conferences range from unprepared oral texts to prepared written texts, there can be clashes between the impromptu features of conference interpreting and features of prepared written texts. Knowledge of the field of discourse and of the predictability of text structures is helpful to the interpreter. (Author/MSE)

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EFFECTS OF SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF IMPROMPTU SPEECH ON CONFERENCE INTERPRETING

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Effects of some characteristics of impromptu speech on conference interpreting

Abstract. Conference interpreting is an oral impromptu activity. Since texts delivered at conferences range from unprepared oral texts to prepared written texts, there can be clashes between the impromptu features of conference interpreting and features of prepared written texts. Some of the information that aids the interpreter's work is the knowledge of the field of discourse and predictability of text structures.

Conference interpreting as an oral linguistic activity *par excellence* has often been investigated from the point of view of its impromptu characteristics. Here are some of the problems raised.

Goldman-Eisler (1968) views simultaneous interpretation in connection with the production and perception of spontaneous speech. She concludes that simultaneous interpretation, as a variety of spontaneous speech, proceeds in a rhythmic fashion and shows periods of high pausing (hesitant speech) alternating with periods of high fluency (fluent speech, less pausing) on a time axis. Each of these periods taken together (hesitancy + fluency) constitute psycholinguistic cycles of speech production: planning of speech and production of speech. During the pausing period, which is the planning part of the cycle, speech is less organized than during the fluency period; it was found that whereas during the fluency period pauses occurred at grammatically predictable points (constituent boundaries), the majority of pauses during the hesitant period occurred at non-grammatical points.

It is believed by many that this rhythmic character of spontaneous speech can be used to the advantage of the interpreter. One way is to crowd as much as possible of his speech into the pauses of the orator to avoid simultaneous listening and speaking, which is one of the major difficulties in simultaneous interpretation (Van Hoof 1962). But Gerver (1976) counters this claim by saying that the total proportion of pauses in relation to the total speech time is too small to effectively help the interpreter. Barik (1969) and Gerver (1971) have suggested that Ll pauses delineate units of meaning for the interpreter and help segment the input message. In this connection Goldman-Eisler

(1972) discusses some of the strategies interpreters adopt to segment the input. She mentions three ways in which the input can be segmented.

- encoding chunks of speech between pauses as they occur in the L1 message (identity);
- starting to encode before the L1 chunk has ended (fission);
- stringing two or more L1 chunks and then encoding (fusion).

She further found that the strategy adopted depended on the rate of the input message (more identity at faster rates) and the language from which the translation was done. Among the responses of six professional interpreters translating from and into English, French, and German she found 11% of identity, 48% of fission and 41% of fusion. She also discovered that owing to the nature of differences between the two languages, larger chunks were stored when translating from German into English because of the end-placement of the verb in German.

Some authors assume that the most typical input message in interpreting is a spontaneous monologue (cf. Minyar-Beloruchev 1969). It seems to me, on the contrary, that typical messages cover a wide spectrum of texts ranging from unprepared impromptu speech to the reading of a prepared written text. In addition, they can assume the form of a monologue or a dialogue. Below is a list of what I consider some of the typical input texts:

(1) a) a unprepared oral monologue or dialogue (a toast, a repartee, free discussion)
b) a semi-prepared oral monologue with notes (a lecture, a paper, etc.)
c) a written monologue intended for the spoken medium – reading thereof (a lecture, a report, a welcoming speech).
d) a written text intended for the written medium – reading thereof (a final communique, a resolution, a draft document, etc.).[1]

All of the four types of texts are common at any conference, but the first three seem to be predominant, text type (c) being probably the most common.

An interplay of these texts and their translation is, it seems, well-worth investigating from the point of view of the complexity of the task. I would

like to concentrate on their prepared vs. impromptu character and especially on their written vs. spoken form.

It can be assumed that the output text produced by the interpreter has the form of extemporaneous speech. Since we know that the interpreter is the secondary source in the communication chain, we cannot very well speak of his performance as completely impromptu in the sense of 'unprepared, unplanned' because he follows the speaker's (primary source) text. Extemporaneous then means 'produced on the spot on the basis of a previously unknown text'. The term 'unknown text' also merits explanation: obviously we should assume previous knowledge by the interpreter of the field of discourse of the translated texts including the terminology, the topic of the conference, etc. By an 'unknown text' we mean concrete textual realizations of a previously known field of discourse. I believe that extemporaneous speech in this sense has most of the features of impromptu speech.

Only text types (a) and (b) can be thought as having features of impromptu speech because they have an on-the-spot character and are channelled through the spoken medium.[2] Text types (c) and (d) have features characteristic of written discourse.

In terms of differences between written and spoken discourse, and conceiving of translation in its broad, semiotic sense (as in Jakobson 1959 and Ludskanov 1973), we can distinguish the following transformational (= translational) processes as obtaining when the interpreter deals with the above text types:

(2) a) spoken discourse L1 → spoken discourse L2
b) spoken discourse L1 → spoken discourse L2
c) written discourse L1 → (spoken discourse L2)
→ written discourse L2
d) written discourse L1 → (spoken discourse L2)
→ written discourse L2

I would like to claim that processes of translating text types (a) and (b) are simpler than text types (c) and (d). This can be explained as follows: a spoken impromptu text in L1 with all the features characteristic of such type of text is translated into an equivalent text in L2. With text types (c) and (d) we have a more complex situation: written discourse is filtered through the spoken medium and can therefore be affected by features of spoken dis-

course. Linearly it can be represented by positing an intermediate stage of spoken discourse. The final stage is marked as written discourse L2, to suggest that all or almost all features of spoken discourse should be eliminated and what comes out should be a form equivalent of the L1 message, e.g. a resolution. Although it is translated orally by the interpreter, in L2 it should have all of the features of the original including its typical structures and terminology. In reality the relation obviously is not linear and the spoken-discourse stage can be obviated, especially by an experienced interpreter.

All this means is that since conference interpreting is effected through the spoken medium, and thus has an impromptu character, features of impromptu speech come to be present in the final product of translation.

Let us look et some of the traces of impromptu speech features in actual interpretation.[3]

A. Every sample of interpretation contains numerous instances of deviations from a fluent rendition of the text, characteristic of impromptu speech. Here are some varieties with examples:

(3) a) hesitation:
At the moment. . er. . both the nations. . er. . want. . er. .
to normalize their relations.
b) stuttering:
Panie Pre. . Pre. . Premierze [Mr. Prime Minister]
two coun. . two coun. . two countries
c) repetition:
friendly. . friendly relations
our. . our. . two nations
d) false start:
President Nixon's visit in our country on the. .
at the invitation of the Chinese government. . .
. . . when the common. . mm. . hopes will. . be. . mm. .
come true. . .

Such deviations yield evidence of the planning and monitoring of speech. The deviations in (a) - (c) are of the planning type. A hesitation or a pause is an indicator of thought processes connected with the selection of a word, a phrase or a construction to fit the preceding material. They can be subsumed

under planning because they precede the enunciation of the following part. Stuttering and repetition are somewhat ambiguous in this respect mainly because stuttering can be caused by pathological characteristics of an individual and repetition can also be viewed as monitoring the material already enunciated. A false start obviously is a monitoring type of deviation.

Planning or monitoring can be good or bad. The deviations can expose deficiencies in linguistic competence: they then signal errors of competence. But they can also reveal deficiencies in translational competence, such as difficulties in the selection of an equivalent construction or lexical item to match the L1 material or to fit the preceding L2 material or difficulties in choosing the optimal ear-voice span in simultaneous interpreting or in storing L1 material in consecutive interpretation.

B. It is sometimes assumed that, as opposed to a written text, speech has a looser structure (cf. Leech and Svartvik 1975:159). In translation this can be manifested by greater use of coordination, fewer embeddings, omission of subordinate clauses, conjuncts, and collapsing of sentences with accompanying simplifications in T2 (= text in L2).

Two examples:

(4)

T1		T2
complex sentence	→	compound sentence
Since it is possible by this means to make use of both sides of a page, books for the blind are less bulky.		Książkę można w ten sposób drukować dwustronnie i całość jest objętościowo mniejsza. [The book can this way be printed on both sides and the whole is smaller in volume.]

(5)

T1		T2
simple + complex sentence	→	simple sentence
Braille's idea was to use raised dots instead of raised letters. He evolved a system which made use of six dots in all.		System Braille'a polegał na zastosowaniu układów sześciu wypukłych punktów. [Braille's system consisted in the in the use of six raised dots.]

In our sample translation (Kopczyński 1980:52-60) we found that by far the most frequent interpreting strategy consisted of what we call decomposition operations, i.e., syntactic simplifications and omissions. A very striking pattern of omissions consisted of leaving out modifying elements of different kinds, from adjectives and adverbials to relative phrases and clauses and adverbial clauses. The strategy is then apparently to focus the attention in the first instance on the constitutive part of T1: the main clause, the main verb, the head noun. The modifying elements, including subordinate clauses, are evidently viewed as redundant and frequently dismissied (*ibid.*, 85-93).

C. In terms of levels of usage, written discourse is often associated with formality and politeness and spoken discourse with informality and familiarity (Leech and Svartvik 1975:27). In interpretation, the effects of this impromptu characteristic can be expressed in stylistic shifts in formality. Below are some examples in which interpreters have used more colloquial phrases than the occasion calls for.

	T1	T2
(6)	Na zakończenie wznoszę toast na cześć Prezydenta Nixona. . . [In conclusion, I propose a toast to President Nixon. . .]	a) I drink to President Nixon b) I'd like to toast. . . c) At the end, a toast to. . .
(7)	I wish to thank you. . .	a) Dziękuję Panu [Thank you] b) Dziękuję bardzo [Thank you very much]

The above are fragments of text type (c), a toast prepared for delivery at a summit meeting. It contains a number of formal ritualized expressions that should be rendered very carefully at such a high level of formality. This tendency to lapse into a less formal stylistic level is frequent practice among interpreters.

To sum up. Since conference interpreting is an oral activity, it has features of impromptu speech, and it can affect performance, especially when T1 is not impromptu speech itself. Such a text can be interfered with by impromptu-speech features in varying degrees, thus

- it can retain all of its appropriate features in terms of structure and style except it is delivered orally (e.g. text type (d), a convention, delivered fluently with all the appropriate terminology, style, and structure);
- it can retain all of its appropriate features but is delivered with deviations typical of impromptu speech (examples in (3));
- it can contain traces of impromptu speech structures (examples (4) and (5));
- it can contain traces of impromptu speech style (examples (6) and (7)).

* * *

It is a well-known fact that texts often defy neat classification. This general truth obviously applied to the text types mentioned in (1).

For instance, texts of the (c) type (written monologue intended for oral delivery) can have a highly mixed character. On the one hand one such text, a toast, even if it is prepared in advance for a formal occasion such as a summit meeting, basically has an interpersonal function characteristic for speaking where referential content is of little importance. Also, since it is delivered orally, it can rely on paralinguistic and non-linguistic cues for cohesion and can contain a number of exophoric devices. On the other hand, it can have features of written discourse such as verbalization of cohesive devices, and formulaic expressions not common in speaking.

Let us look at the toast as a type of text, its macro-structure and degree of ritualization:[4]

- it is a monologue but of a peculiar kind: although it is a long stretch of discourse delivered by a single speaker, it in fact functions within two-way communication because there is usually a follow-up toast. Therefore we can speak of an initiator toast and a response toast and each of them should be different in structure;
- its main function is interpersonal;
- the parties to the transaction are visible;
- in terms of tenor it can range from formal to intimate styles;
- formal toasts are usually -impromptu (prepared, planned) and intimate toasts are +impromptu.

I shall assume that the macrostructure of the toast contains the following parts:

a) address (A)
b) embellishment (E)
c) identification (I)
d) welcome/appreciation (W)/(AP)
e) greetings (G)
f) exhortation (EX)
g) incantation (IN)

Examples of realizations of these elements of the structure are to be found in the Appendix.

The elements of the context for the two toasts are:

field. . . . . reception at a summit meeting
tenor . . . . . head of state: head of state: state delegation; maximum social distance;
mode . . . . . spoken medium: aural channel: visual contact.

The structures of the two toasts are

IT: A - I/W - I/G - EX - IN
RT: A - I/AP - EX - IN

We can see that there are striking similarities between the two speeches but the first one is an initiator toast (IT) and the other one is a response toast (RT). The difference is in the WELCOME vs. APPRECIATION elements. The IT also contains the GREETINGS element.

There is also a striking similarity in the ordering of the elements. I would like to claim that within the stated context the ordering is rather rigid.

The element that is missing in both toasts is what we have called EMBELLISHMENT. It is a joke, a quotation, a metaphor, etc., usually placed near the beginning of the toast. In the English-speaking cultures this element is not limited to toasts but extends to other types of speeches and lectures ('you are supposed to tell a joke at the beginning'). This brings out the fact that some

of the elements are obligatory, others optional. EMBELLISHMENT is obviously an optional element.

It may be that in the case of the toast the degree of optionality of elements, like the ordering, depends on the level of formality. However, more extensive research would be needed to ascertain this. Evidently the context of our example toasts was considered by the speakers as too formal for joking. Conversely, the less formal the context, the more optionality: at a friendly party you may very well omit all the elements except the incantation and simply say 'Cheers!'.

Thus, differing macrostructures for the toast according to the tenor variable could be:

a) maximum social distance: A - (E) - I - W/AP - (G) - EX - IN

b) social distance: A - E - (I) - AP - (EX) - IN

c) minimum social distance: (A) - (E) - (I) - (AP) - (EX) - IN

Optional elements in (b) are arbitrary for lack of more extensive data; (c) is the case of 'Cheers!'.

Finally, we can see that in the appended toasts there is no significant informative content.[5]

Some texts are more ritualistic and therefore have a more predictable structure than others.[6] One such text is the toast. Others include greetings and the inaugural address among the ± impromptu texts, and the final communique, statutes, and agreements among the -impromptu texts. I believe that predictability in this sense plays an enormous role in the assessment of relative ease or difficulty in interpreting. And it is an important element in any discussion of impromptu speech.

NOTES

[1] Our 'prepared' vs. 'unprepared' is similar to N.E. Enkvist's 'scripted' vs. 'unscripted' in this volume. 'Scripted' presupposes 'planned' although 'unscripted' does not necessarily presuppose 'unplanned'. In any case, completely unplanned speech seems to be a purely theoretical construct; there is always some degree of planning involved in speaking – see e.g. Goldman-Eisler (1968).

[2] It seems that 'impromptu' is typically associated with the spoken medium although written impromptu texts are also cited (e.g. letters). It may be that letters are cited as impromptu texts because they are stylistically closer to speech than other written texts and because they are usually produced on the spot without planning or preparation. In the latter sense we can even think of poetry as being impromptu if the poet writes under sudden inspiration. However, any text or part of text can be written under instantaneous inspiration, including scientific texts. Are such texts to be counted as impromptu or not? The answer depends on how we define planning, scripting or preparation. In spite of other insoluble complexities, the dichotomy between spoken and written texts has the advantage of at least one fairly clear criterion, trivial as it is: spoken is spoken and written is written. Luckily, there is a partial overlap between the two dichotomies and I believe that within our communicative intuition 'spoken impromptu' is felt as unmarked and 'written impromptu' as marked.

[3] All of the translations cited here were done by students of interpretation at the Institute of Applied Linguistics, University of Warsaw.

[4] The general format of the analysis is that developed by M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan (cf. Hasan 1977).

[5] But sometimes the order or omission of elements or sub-elements can give cues as to the assessment of and attitude to the negotiations, talks, or relations between the countries involved. In such instances the study of textual macrostructures is useful, because deviations from the archetypal macrostructure can become significant. Also, some elements can become highly codified and assume idiomatic meanings, e.g. the assessment of talks in a final communique ('The talks were held in a businesslike atmosphere', 'The talks were held in a cordial atmosphere.' etc.).

[6] See Enkvist's 'macrostructural boundness' in this volume.

APPENDIX

Initiator Toast

A Mr. President and Mrs. Nixon, Ladies and Gentlemen, comrades and friends,

I/W First of all I have the pleasure on behalf of Chairman Mao-Tse-Tung and the Chinese Government to extend our welcome to Mr. President and Mrs. Nixon and to our other American guests.

I/G I also wish to take this opportunity to extend on behalf of the Chinese people cordial greetings to the American people on the other side of the Great Ocean.

EX President Nixon's visit to our country at the invitation of the Chinese Government provides the leaders of the two countries with an opportunity of meeting in person to seek the normalization of relations between the two countries and also to exchange views on questions of concern to the two sides. This is a positive in conformity with the desire of the Chinese and American peoples and an event unprecedented in the history of the relations between China and the United States. The American people are a great people. The Chinese people are a great people. The peoples of our two countries have always been friendly to each other. But owing to the reasons known to all, contacts between the two peoples were suspended for over twenty years. Now through the common efforts of China and the United States, the gate to friendly contacts has finally been opened. At the present time it has become a strong desire of the Chinese and American peoples to promote the normalization of relations between the two countries and work for the relaxation of tension . . .

IN In conclusion, I propose a toast to the health of Mr. President and Mrs. Nixon, to the health of our other American guests, to the health of our friends and comrades present, and to the friendship between the Chinese and American peoples!

Response Toast

A Mr. Prime Minister and all of you distinguished guests this evening.

I/AP On behalf of all your American guests I wish to thank you for the incomparable hospitality for which the Chinese people are justly famous throughout the world. I particularly want to pay tribute, not only to those who prepared the magnificent dinner, but also those who provided the splendid music. Never have I heard American music played better in a foreign land.
Mr. Prime Minister, I wish to thank you for your very gracious and eloquent remarks. At this moment, through

EX the wonder of telecommunications, more people are seeing and hearing what we say than on any such occasion in the whole history of the world. Yet what we say here will not be remembered. What we do here can change the world. In the spirit of frankness which I hope will characterize our talks this week, let us recognize at the outset these points: we have at times in the past been enemies. We have great differences today. As we discuss our differences, neither of us will compromise our principles. But while we cannot close the gulf between us we can try to bridge it so that we may be able to talk across it.

IN In that spirit, I ask all of you present to join me in raising your glasses to Chairman Mao, to Prime Minister Chou, and to the friendship of Chinese and American people, which can lead to friendship and peace for all people in the world.

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